



Project Case Study

The Community Directorate, Adult Social Care Somerset County Council

| The Challenge...

To allow people with and without hearing impairments at Somerset County Council to clearly hear the proceedings of small and large meetings

| The Solution...

A portable and highly customised radio system, made by Swedish company Comfort Audio, and supplied by Gordon Morris Ltd.

| The Benefits...

Better integration and participation in meetings for all staff

Service providers face increasing demands to improve access to their facilities. Under the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, organisations are obliged to make provision for those with disabilities, including hearing impairment. Somerset Adult Learning and Leisure faced just such a challenge. As a division of Somerset County Council, the organisation offers a range of flexible opportunities for education and affordable leisure across the county. They provide courses and activities designed to meet the needs and aspirations of all sectors of the community, from holiday play schemes for children, to challenging educational qualifications for adults.

Finding the Right Solution

Tim Luxton is a hearing aid user and manager of the Adult Social Care Learning & Development team within the Community Directorate. The aim of the Community Directorate is to make a difference for communities across the County through the development and delivery of services for which they are responsible. Adult Social Care itself arranges social care services for older people, younger people with physical disabilities and people with sensory loss. Services are based on the principles of promoting independence and maximising choice.

Tim Luxton and Gordon Morris have been working closely together for thirty years. They are both hearing impaired and are both driven by a passion and determination to ensure that hearing aid users are provided with the same opportunities as everyone else. Gordon Morris Ltd has also done extensive work for Somerset County Council buildings in the past. In 2007, Tim approached Gordon regarding a system that would benefit a hearing impaired person in meetings and conference situations. Portability was of utmost importance and infrared systems were explored initially. Tim was keen to see what developments there had been in the way of portable systems and the Touring Conference radio system, made by the Swedish company Comfort Audio, was an instant success. Gordon Morris's innovation and personal touch afforded Tim with a system perfect for both his individual needs and those of others with hearing impairment.

Tim Luxton's Feedback

Tim says about the system: "As a hearing aid user myself, I often attend meetings of all sizes and have difficulty hearing everything that is being said. After seeing the team at Gordon Morris Limited and informing them of my problem, I was provided with the Touring Conference System, customised to my requirements. That's the difference with Gordon Morris Limited – you get a very personal service.

I have since used the system in two or three different sorts of meetings of various sizes and the portability and sheer simplicity of the system is wonderful. Microphones can simply be handed out with the papers for the meeting and there are no wires for people to trip over. Within minutes of the meeting beginning people were sitting there with their hands up when they wanted to speak rather than speaking over one another. It brought a certain rigour and discipline to meetings that I have not experienced before, and from an equality point of view that is so important. I have already received a considerable amount of positive feedback from both hearing aid users and non-hearing aid users. Our minute-taker actually claimed that she'd 'never found it so easy to take such a clear set of minutes!'

There are many benefits to be accessed when using the Touring Conference System for everyone - both for hearing and non-hearing impaired people. By using this system in a meeting situation, people can engage with deafness and help reduce the stigma of the disability. Hearing aid users are not isolated in meetings and I have even found that some people who thought they didn't have a hearing impairment have decided to go to an audiologist after hearing the difference in the clarity of sound produced by the Touring Conference System!"

The Adult Social Care department in Somerset County Council have now bought four systems and are encouraging other departments and Councils to do the same.

Gordon Morris Ltd would like to thank Tim Luxton for his kind cooperation with this article and wishes everyone at Somerset County Council the very best for the future.

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